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C O N F I D E N T I A L SANAA 001929

FOR NEA/ARP:AMACDONALD

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [YM](#)
SUBJECT: 23 INJURED IN OPPOSITION DEMONSTRATIONS

REF: SANAA 1830

Classified By: Ambassador Stephen A. Seche for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

Summary

11. (C) Demonstrations organized by Yemen's political opposition in Sana'a on November 27, and the ROYG reaction to them, turned violent, resulting in the injury of 23 people. The ROYG reportedly assaulted reporters covering the demonstrations and some accuse ROYG forces of firing on demonstrators. Unless the impasse between the ruling party and the opposition over the coming Parliamentary elections is resolved, this kind of violence is likely to recur. End Summary.

Demonstrations Turn Violent

12. (U) Demonstrations organized by the opposition Joint Meeting Parties (JMP) turned violent on November 27. Press reports indicate that 23 people, including two policemen, were injured in clashes between protesters and riot police. The protests, which are being called the "November Uprising," were intended by the organizers to protest what they characterize as fraud in the voter registration lists for the April 2009 Parliamentary elections. Opposition press reported that police officers assaulted journalists attempting to cover the event.

13. (C) RSO sources monitoring Tahrir Square, where the largest confrontation took place, reported that security forces fired into the air to disperse the protesters. They also reported seeing protesters who were bloodied during the confrontations. Secretary General Abdulwahab al-Anisi of JMP member party Islah told POL/E Chief on November 29 that a group of police in another area fired on the protesters, hitting them in the abdomen and thighs. (Note: Embassy security sources have not corroborated this story. End note.) Anisi said that the protesters had been instructed to avoid any violence or confrontations with security forces. He added that security forces in general appeared to want to avoid violence as well. He said that a single commander was responsible for ordering his troops to fire on the protesters and added that the JMP has reported the name of the commander to ROYG authorities.

Journalists Assaulted

14. (C) Among the reporters attacked by security forces were Said Thabit, Secretary General of the Yemen Journalists Forum (YJF), and Sana'a-based al-Ayyam correspondent Abdulfetah Khaider. Thabit told the Embassy on November 30 that he was beaten with a cattle prod by uniformed police officers until ROYG personnel in civilian dress intervened and told the police officers who he was. Thabit speculated that if he was not the leader of the YJF he would have received a much worse beating (as he claims he saw other journalists receive). When he asked the police why they assaulted him, they responded that they had been instructed to beat journalists.

15. (C) Aden-based Al-Ayyam General Manager Basha Bashraheel told POL/E Chief on November 30 that Khaider was detained by

uniformed police and then transferred to a civilian vehicle that transported him to an area away from the demonstrations, where he was severely beaten. Bashraheel also confirmed a story, reported to Pol/E Chief by Anisi, that Khaider,s captors attempted to break his fingers by placing his hand on a table and hitting his fingers with stones.

Protests to Continue

¶16. (C) Security contacts of post's Force Protection Detachment (FPD) have warned that protests are likely to continue in the capital, particularly in Tahrir Square. On November 30 police fired into the air to disperse a crowd in Aden. Bashraheel noted, however, that the security force response to the demonstration was more controlled than has been the case in Aden in the past and speculated that security forces are trying to avoid violent confrontations.

Comment

¶17. (C) The President and the GPC want to see the Parliamentary elections go forward on time with JMP participation (reftel). The longer the JMP continues its boycott, however, the more likely ROYG tempers are to flare. The ROYG is no stranger to strong-arm responses to demonstrations and harassment of journalists. If the JMP continues to refuse to participate in the elections preparation process and organizes additional public demonstrations accusing the government of fraud, the events of November 27 are likely to be repeated. End Comment.

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